

Draft FMI Talking Points on SNAP Food Choice

- The food retail industry through direct interaction in our stores and with our employees plays the critical front-line role in the shopping experience of SNAP/food stamp customers.
- We have long partnered with USDA to ensure SNAP customers are treated the same as all other customers who shop in our stores.
- Limitations to foods qualifying for purchase under the SNAP program would make SNAP customers distinguishable from other customers. Limitations would create a negative label for the program and its participants - a label Electronic Benefit Transfer (EBT) has taken strides to eliminate.
- As an industry, we believe it is critical to educate all our customers about healthy eating, not just single out one subset of shoppers.
- Additionally, the SNAP program is currently piloting a program to test the effectiveness of healthy incentives within the program and whether or not those incentives impact shopper's behavior. This Healthy Incentives pilot program is taking place in Hampden County Massachusetts.
- New limitations imposed upon the SNAP program, would lead to customer confusion at the checkout. It would also require new cashier training across our industry, and would increase compliance burdens and enforcement for both retailers and USDA.
- Restricting certain foods from purchase in the program, would require costly updates and re-programming of retailer point-of-sale equipment.
- A restriction of certain foods would necessitate a central source for identifying, and keeping up to date, the list of banned products. Resources and staff, likely from USDA, would be required to meet the significant challenge of keeping the list current with the constantly changing food products in the marketplace.
- Trying to define a "healthy food" is a slippery slope. In the case of the NYC waiver request, the definition of the type of food to be banned was "sweetened beverages containing more than 10 calories per cup (exempting fruit juice without added sugar, milk products, and milk substitutes." That would result in SNAP customer being unable to purchase many fruit juices.
- Should USDA allow a state or local pilot project, it would be a step back from the currently interoperability of the SNAP program where SNAP customers can expect the same treatment in any part of the country.

- In some areas, the most convenient grocery store may be a Mom and Pop store with a limited line of food varieties, instead stocking food basics such as milk, standard juice products, bread and snacks. In this case, the SNAP customer would be at a disadvantage because he or she could not shop in the same manner as others, since low calorie fruit juice may not be offered for sale.
- Government intervention in the ability of shoppers to choose what foods they may put in their grocery basket departs from the SNAP program's original purpose of providing assistance for those in need, and begins to single out one segment of shoppers by presuming their inability to make healthy food choices for themselves.
- Most importantly, limitations on food choice within the SNAP program would lead to a more complicated shopping experience for SNAP users, which is something we go to great lengths to avoid.